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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
12 June 54

TO: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: Comment on the 12 June confidence vote in the French Assembly

Because of the protracted crisis which forming a new government would entail, French president Coty is likely to make intensive efforts to avoid accepting the resignation tendered him on 12 June by the Laniel cabinet following the latter's 306-293 defeat on a vote of confidence. Since the opposition failed to muster a constitutional majority of 314, Laniel's resignation was not mandatory, although in similar instances in the past a premier defeated by less than a constitutional majority has always resigned immediately.

The proffered resignation may be merely a subterfuge to enable Laniel to stay in office. Laniel was reported to have stated prior to the 13 May vote that he would not resign under such circumstances, and on 10 June president Coty was reported to have said that he would not accept a resignation. There is, however, no clear constitutional precedent for the situation.

In view of the 322 to 263 decision by which the Assembly rejected Laniel's effort of 9 June to avoid a vote of confidence, the smaller opposition vote on 12 June reflects the Assembly's unwillingness to face the full consequences of the overthrow of the government, and in particular the inability of the various opposition elements to agree on a successor.

If Coty refuses to accept Laniel's resignation, the premier may attempt to carry on without further formality, or he may demand a clearer indication of the assembly's intentions. The latter course would mean another vote of confidence to force the assembly either to endorse the government or risk dissolution through overthrowing the cabinet by a constitutional majority.

If the assembly then rejects Laniel by 314, dissolution of the assembly is permissible but not mandatory. The decision is taken in the Council of Ministers, which consists of the entire cabinet presided over by President Coty, and after

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consulting the president of the assembly.

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Coty is reported inclined to favor such pro-EDC candidates as Bidault (MRP), Pinay (Independent) and Robert Schuman (MRP), although he would also consider Edgar Faure (Radical Socialist) who has recently come out against EDC. He has no intention, however, of considering Mendes-France who would presumably head a left-center coalition favoring withdrawal from Indochina and delay on EDC.

Coty is reported opposed to dissolution of the Assembly, believing that new elections now would allow the Communists, as well as the MRP and the Socialists, to gain additional seats in the assembly. Furthermore, dissolution now would, according to article 52 of the constitution, make it mandatory for the Communist party to participate in the interim caretaker cabinet. President Coty would be legally required to name the president of the Assembly, Socialist Andre Le Troquer, as premier. The latter, in conjunction with the Assembly steering committee would name a new minister of the interior, who exercises control of the police. All parties in the Assembly would then be given proportional representation in the government through ministers without portfolio.

Elections must be held on a Sunday within 20 to 30 days following the dissolution. The new Assembly convenes the third Thursday following the election.

If Coty accepts Laniel's resignation on the basis of the 306-293 vote - eight votes less than a constitutional majority - dissolution would not be legally possible, and a prolonged crisis within the Assembly is almost certain to result. If the Radical Socialists remain adamant in their reported determination to force the cabinet's resignation, Coty may have no recourse but to attempt to get a government based on the pro-EDC majority still presumed to exist. The MRP, whose support is essential for any possible coalition in the present Assembly, insists it will not be part of an anti-EDC government. Hence,

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any alternative to Laniel would require support for the government, if not actual participation in it, by the Socialists, who have hitherto refused to assume ministerial responsibility.

HUNTINGTON D. SHELDON
Assistant Director
Current Intelligence



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